

WE CLAIM:

1. A method of operating a video-on-demand service comprising at least one interactive channel coupled to a viewing station, said service accessible to subscribers and non-subscribers of said service,
5 said service providing video programs, segments of said video programs, and a list of at least some of said video programs, said method comprising:
transmitting a first signal to said
viewing station acknowledging access of said service;
10 transmitting said list to said viewing station;
receiving a second signal from said
viewing station indicating a selection of one of said segments or said video programs;
15 transmitting one of said segments to said viewing station when said second signal indicates a selection of said one segment;
preventing transmission of one of said video programs to said viewing station when said second
20 signal indicates a selection of said one video program by one of said non-subscribers; and
transmitting one of said video programs to said viewing station when said second signal indicates a selection of said one video program by one
25 of said subscribers.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein said first signal acknowledges access of said service at said viewing station by one of said subscribers.

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4. The method of claim 1 wherein at least some of said video programs and said segments comprise video and audio portions.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein said video programs comprise at least one television program.

a multiple processor computer that allows said list and said previews to be transmitted to subscribers and non-subscribers of said service and that allows said video programs to be transmitted to only said subscribers,

a transmitting station coupled to
said computer, said transmitting station operative to

transmit said video programs, said previews, and said list and operative to receive said selections; and

20 a communication medium coupled to said transmitting station over which said video programs, said previews, and said list are transmitted from said telecasting facility and over which said selections are transmitted to said telecasting facility.

8. The video-on-demand service of claim 7 wherein said communication medium comprises a plurality of channels.

9. The video-on-demand service of claim 7 wherein said communication medium is selected from the group consisting of coaxial cable and fiber optic cable.

10. A method of operating a video-on-demand service, said service interactively coupled to a viewing station comprising a video display, said service accessible to non-subscribers of said service,
5 said service providing video programs, segments of said video programs, and a list of at least some of said video programs, said method comprising:

 displaying on said display said list to one of said non-subscribers;

10 displaying on said display one of said segments selected by one of said non-subscribers;

 preventing display on said display of one of said video programs selected by one of said non-subscribers;

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- 15 displaying on said display an offer for
one of said non-subscribers to become a subscriber
substantially immediately after said non-subscriber
selects one of said video programs for display;
 receiving interactively from said
20 non-subscriber via said viewing station an acceptance
of said offer to become a subscriber;
 establishing said non-subscriber as a
subscriber substantially immediately after said
receiving; and
25 allowing said video programs selected by
said non-subscriber to be displayed on said display
substantially immediately after said establishing.

11. The video-on-demand service of claim 10
wherein said display comprises a television monitor.

12. The video-on-demand service of claim 10
wherein said display provides audio.

13. The video-on-demand service of claim 10
wherein said display is part of a personal computer.

14. A video-on-demand service comprising:
a telecasting facility operative to
transmit video programs, previews of said video
programs, and lists of said video programs, said
5 facility comprising a first computer programmed to
allow said lists and said previews to be transmitted to
subscribers and non-subscribers of said service and to

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allow said video programs to be transmitted to only said subscribers;

- 10 a viewing station comprising a video display and a second computer, said viewing station operative to receive said video programs, said previews, and said lists and operative to transmit selections of said video programs and said previews,
- 15 said second computer programmed to display on said video display said programs, said previews, and said lists; and

- a communication medium coupled to said facility and to said viewing station over which said
- 20 programs, said previews, and said lists are transmitted from said facility to said viewing station and over which said selections are transmitted from said viewing station to said facility.

15. The video-on-demand service of claim 14 wherein:

- said viewing station is operated by one of said non-subscribers;
- 5 said telecasting facility is further operative to transmit subscription offers over said communication medium to said viewing station; and
- said viewing station is further operative to receive said subscription offers and to
- 10 transmit a subscription offer acceptance over said communication medium to said telecasting facility.

16. A method of operating a video-on-demand service, said service interactively coupled to a

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viewing station comprising a video display, said
service accessible to subscribers and non-subscribers
5 of said service, said service providing video programs,
segments of said video programs, and lists of said
video programs, and said method comprising:

receiving video program classification
information associated with a viewer identifier;
10 storing said classification information;
displaying on said display any of said
segments selected from said lists by one of said
non-subscribers;
preventing display on said display of
15 any of said video programs selected from said lists by
one of said non-subscribers;
receiving said viewer identifier from
said viewing station;
generating one of said lists in
20 accordance with said stored classification information;
and
displaying on said display said
generated list, only those segments and video programs
on said generated list being selectable for display on
25 said display.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein said
classification information causes those said video
programs that contain violence to be excluded from said
generated list.

18. The method of claim 16 wherein said
classification information causes only those said video

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programs that are suitable for children to be included on said generated list.

19. A method of operating a video-on-demand service, said service interactively coupled to a viewing station, said service accessible to subscribers and non-subscribers of said service, said service
- 5 operative to provide video programs, segments of said video programs, and a list of at least some of said video programs and operative to receive selections of said segments and said video programs, said method comprising:
- 10 receiving an identifier from said viewing station;
- comparing said identifier with a list of identifiers corresponding to said subscribers;
- receiving one of said selections;
- 15 transmitting one of said video programs to said viewing station when said comparing indicates that said identifier is on said list of identifiers and said selection corresponds to said one video program;
- preventing transmission of one of said
- 20 video programs to said viewing station when said comparing indicates that said identifier is not on said list of identifiers and said selection corresponds to said one video program; and
- transmitting one of said segments to
- 25 said viewing station when said comparing indicates that said identifier is not on said list of identifiers and said selection corresponds to said one segment.

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20. The method of claim 19 wherein said identifier is a viewer identifier, said method further comprising:

- receiving a station identifier from said
5 viewing station; and
- addressing transmissions to said viewing station using said station identifier to determine an address of said viewing station.

21. A video-on-demand service comprising:

- a telecasting facility operative to transmit video programs, previews of said video programs, and lists of said video programs, said
5 facility also operative to receive selections of said previews and said video programs, said facility comprising:
 - a first computer programmed to allow said lists and said previews to be transmitted to
10 subscribers and non-subscribers of said service and programmed to allow video programs to be transmitted to only said subscribers, and
 - a transmitting station coupled to said first computer and operative to transmit said
15 video programs, said previews, and said lists and operative to receive said selections; and
 - a viewing station for use by said subscribers and non-subscribers, said viewing station operative to receive said programs, said previews, and
20 said lists and operative to transmit said selections, said viewing station comprising:
 - a video display; and

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a second computer coupled to said
display and programmed to provide said display with an
25 interactive interface to facilitate selection of said
video programs.

22. The video-on-demand service of claim 21
wherein said preview comprises a portion of a
corresponding video program.

23. The video-on-demand service of claim 21
wherein said preview comprises a summary of the content
of a corresponding video program.

24. The video-on-demand service of claim 23
wherein said summary comprises audio.

25. The video-on-demand service of claim 23
wherein said summary comprises full-motion video.

26. The video-on-demand service of claim 21
wherein:

said telecasting facility is further
operative to transmit textual descriptions of said
5 video programs;
said viewing station is further
operative to receive said textual descriptions; and
said interactive interface comprises:
a first screen that displays one of
10 said lists;
a second screen that displays one
of said previews; and

a third screen that displays one of
said textual descriptions.

27. The video-on-demand service of claim 26
wherein any one of said screens is displayable
immediately after display of any other one of said
screens.

28. The video-on-demand service of claim 26
wherein one of said video programs is selectable from
any one of said screens.

29. The video-on-demand service of claim 26
wherein another one of said lists, said segments, and
said textual descriptions is displayable on said
respective screens immediately after a respective one
5 of said lists, said segments, and said textual
descriptions is displayed on said respective screens.

30. The video-on-demand service of claim 21
wherein:

said telecasting facility is further
operative to transmit textual descriptions of said
5 video programs;

said viewing station is further
operative to receive said textual descriptions; and
said interactive interface comprises:

a list mode actuator that when
10 actuated causes one of said lists to be displayed on
said display;

a preview mode actuator that when actuated causes one of said previews to be displayed on said display; and

- 15 an information mode actuator that when actuated causes one of said textual descriptions to be displayed on said display.

31. The video-on-demand service of claim 30 wherein said viewing station further comprises a remote control unit, said remote control unit operative to actuate any one of said actuators.

32. The video-on-demand service of claim 21 wherein:

said video programs are organized into categories; and

- 5 said interactive interface comprises:

a previous-category actuator that when actuated displays on said display a preceding category of video programs in a sequence of categories;

- a next-category actuator that when
10 actuated displays on said display the next category of video programs in said sequence;

a previous-program actuator that when actuated causes a displayed one of said lists to scroll in a first direction on said display;

- 15 a next-program actuator that when actuated causes a displayed one of said lists to scroll in a second direction on said display; and

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a selection actuator that when
actuated selects one of said video programs for display
20 on said display.

33. The video-on-demand service of claim 32
wherein one of said categories is comedy.

34. The video-on-demand service of claim 32
wherein said previous-category actuator and said
next-category actuator operate in an endless loop.

35. The video-on-demand service of claim 32
wherein said viewing station further comprises a remote
control unit, said remote control unit operative to
actuate any one of said actuators.

36. A method of operating a video-on-demand
service, said service interactively coupled to a
viewing station comprising a video display, said
service accessible to subscribers and non-subscribers
5 of said service, said service operative to transmit
video programs, segments of said video programs, and a
list of at least some of said video programs, said
method comprising:

displaying said list on said display,
10 said list available to said subscribers and said non-
subscribers;

displaying one of said segments on said
display, said segment available to said subscribers and
said non-subscribers; and

15 displaying one of said video programs on
said display, said video program available only to
subscribers.

37. The method of claim 36 wherein said
displaying one of said segments comprises displaying a
preview of one of said video programs on said display.

38. The method of claim 36 wherein said
displaying one of said segments comprises displaying a
portion of one of said video programs on said display.

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